WINTER CARNIVAL IN A WESTERN TOWN

Identity, Change, and the Good of the Community

LISA GABBERT

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Laughter, Ambivalence, and the Carnivalesque
Lake Monsters and Festive Culture

Sharlie and Winter Carnival are like Christmas and Santa Claus. They just plain go together.

Marilyn Krahn

Images of Sharlie, the serpentine monster that allegedly lives in Payette Lake, permeated McCall's Winter Carnival, yet the festival was not specifically about Sharlie, and the chamber of commerce did not purposefully map her onto the event. The residents decided that Sharlie was appropriate, and they incorporated her in various ways. This chapter suggests that Sharlie was an important, complex symbol of identity that mediated both inward and outward dimensions of community and encompassed a broad range of meanings. She manifested locally in memorates and legends; she also was tied to international folklore complexes, national ideologies, and the mass media (Gutowski 1998). Because of these wide-ranging associations, Sharlie united rather than split the expression of community identity as insular or expansive that characterized the dynamics of other Winter Carnival events.

Sharlie sightings have been reported regularly since at least the 1930s and likely before (fig. 62). Most people thought of Sharlie as benign, and they lovingly embraced their local mystery, considering it part tall story and part half-believed reality that no one could fully explain. Local sculptor Karen Morris said,

> Sharlie has been around McCall forever. It used to be on all of our maps, our Winter Carnival maps. It's just a local legend, the serpent in the lake. And over the years, different people have had sightings of Sharlie. And some people say it's a wave or a ripple in the lake, and other people

COULD THIS BE A PICTURE OF "SHARLIE"?
Greetings From Payette Lakes
McCall, Idaho
Could this picture really be that of Sharlie?
It could be — but it happens that the original picture was drawn by Mrs. Perc Shelton some five or six years ago.
Gladys doesn't claim she has ever seen SHARLIE, either before or after he was named — she just drew the rather fanciful picture.
Anyway, it's the way one person thinks a serpent might look.

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Fig. 62. Early drawing of Sharlie.

> see the head moving along in the lake and see humps moving along in the lake. There's a million different stories about Sharlie.[1]

Morris's comment illustrates the ambivalence that surrounds Sharlie, an ambivalence that mirrors many people's attitude toward the festival itself. Ambivalence here means of two minds. Stories of Sharlie sightings were taken seriously. At the same time people also treated them as jokes, tourist gimmicks, or as drunken hallucinations. Sharlie also was used as fodder for pranks and tall tales, and she was part of a more general frontier mythology. This ambivalent attitude frequently was expressed in laughter; local people played with the idea of Sharlie across a variety of contexts.

The presence of ambivalence and laughter evoked by Sharlie suggests that she was carnivalesque. Carnivalesque figures create chaos and are not easily fixed. They invoke laughter as a transgressive, transformative resource to break down classifications, generate various meanings, overturn or invert established orders, and rearrange social and ontological categories; at the same time, they are ambivalent figures because of the potential danger inherent in reassembling these categories (Bakhtin [1968] 1984). This is especially true of

1 Karen Morris, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 19 February 2001.

monsters because they create disorder and straddle boundaries in a variety of ways (Westrum 1975). One strong indication of Sharlie's indeterminacy is the fact that people used all three pronouns—he, she, and it—to refer to Sharlie in interviews.[2] As a carnivalesque figure, Sharlie was useful for thinking about and reassembling local identity, playfully mediating distinctions between insiders and outsiders, truth and lying, and fact and fiction.

Sharlie in Winter Carnival

The Sharlie images in Winter Carnival have been described in previous chapters, so they are not covered extensively here. Sharlie was not part of the original incarnation of Winter Carnival during the 1920s, although I found anecdotal evidence in state archives suggesting that the legend existed in the early twentieth century. Ann Fitch, for example, interviewed seventy-year-old McCall resident Minnie Osburn in 1972 as part of her student project, and Osburn said that when she was little, her mother told her that Sharlie ate bad little girls. Presumably her mother told her that story by the time she was ten years old, so the legend hypothetically dates to at least 1912.[3] But Sharlie was not associated with Winter Carnival in the 1920s because it was specifically a winter-sports celebration (see chapter four); the revived 1965 festival, however, was a broader affair designed to attract tourists, and it was in this context that Sharlie became appropriate festive material.

Sharlie was immediately incorporated into the 1965 festival through the snow sculptures. Local high-school students built the first Sharlie sculpture in 1965, and people in the local competition subsequently made Sharlie sculptures nearly every year. Examples include domesticated images, such as Sharlie driving a fire truck (fig. 63), swimming in a coffee cup (fig. 64), a baby Sharlie (fig. 65) and sleeping alongside Mrs. Sharlie. Sharlie also was

2 I follow *Star-News* editor Tom Grote's usage in this chapter of the female pronoun, which is also the way I thought of Sharlie when I was a child.

3 Ann Fitch, "Sharlie: The Search for an Identity," 1972, a student folklore project originally deposited in the Northwest Folklore Archive. The archive has since been renamed the Archive of Idaho Folklore Papers, 1963–1972, MG126, Special Collections, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. The project is in series 5, box 8, folder 221. The estimate that the legend dates to at least the early 1900s is further supported by a 1953 *Payette Lakes Star* newspaper article, where Mrs. S. S. Frozy is quoted as saying that she grew up in the Payette Lakes area some forty years earlier and had heard the story then. "Serpent Naming Contest to Close December 31," *Payette Lakes Star,* 24 December 1953.

Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 63. Sharlie in fire truck, 1988.

made as an astronaut alongside a space shuttle (fig. 66). There also have been a variety of more ferocious, dragonlike images (fig. 67). One sculpture depicted Sharlie with green eyes and a red forked tongue; the sign next to it read, "Sharlie, the fantasy of Payette Lake."[4]

That Sharlie was a symbol of local identity and considered to be a member of the community was obvious from my interviews. The title of the Sharlie sculpture that the Krahns made in 2001, for example, was "McCall's Oldest Resident," indicating that they considered her an old-timer. In casual conversations, people described Sharlie as a "friend," someone or something that "everybody knew about." I asked Marilyn Krahn why she thought Sharlie was a popular topic in the local snow-sculpting competition. She said that she saw Sharlie as a source of creativity that people could draw upon and that everybody liked: "Because he belongs to everybody, probably. Sharlie can be different in everybody's mind, so you don't have any pattern you have to follow or anything that you have to build him like. You can build him large or small, and you can make him funny or whimsical. You can make him mean. But I think it's just that everybody likes Sharlie. He's a friend of everybody."[5]

4 Photograph published in the *Adams County Record,* 29 January 1998.

5 Marilyn Krahn interview.

Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 64. Sharlie in a coffee cup.

Dan Krahn thought Sharlie was part of McCall, fun, and both recognizable and appropriate: "It's just part of McCall. People know about it, they talk about it. It's recognizable. So somebody does one. It's part of the fun. It's like Popeye, Snoopy, like the space shuttle. . . . That's part of what people enjoy, what it triggers in their own upbringing. Like Popeye and Charlie Brown. . . . [But] even if it's a cartoon character, it must be appropriate. . . . I wouldn't do [sculpt] Beavis and Butthead."[6] Krahn's comment that Sharlie was an appropriate sculpting subject as compared to Beavis and Butthead (cartoon characters from the 1990s known for their stupidity, violence, and antiauthority attitudes) indicates again that Winter Carnival was considered to be a family-friendly affair, and most activities and sculpture subjects were supposed to be appropriate for children. Sculpting subjects, therefore, could be fun and creative but not controversial.

The most locally famous example of a controversial sculpture was made by Carl Whitaker, a longtime festival participant, in 1981. He recreated *Manneken Pis,* the famous seventeenth-century statue in Brussels of the peeing boy. City officials considered the sculpture inappropriate, and the

6 Dan Krahn, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 21 February 2001.

Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 65. Baby Sharlie.

mayor ordered it razed, inciting laughter and comments throughout the community. Sharlie, however, was frequently associated with children and playfulness and therefore judged appropriate. Not only was her first statue made by high-school students, but the theme of Winter Carnival when the Krahns sculpted her was "Childhood Memories."

Many people also thought that Sharlie was appropriate for Winter Carnival because she was part of McCall's history. Former Winter Carnival Chair Rob Lyons said,

> It's [Sharlie] always just been a part of it [Winter Carnival]. I don't know why or how it got involved in it. I don't know how it got started. [It was] years and years ago as far as the myth of the something in the lake. I think it's just 'cause

Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 66. Sharlie as an astronaut.

it's part of town. So . . . they decided it's part of carnival. I mean, you know, you always see sculptures. Almost every year there's two or three Sharlies around of some sort or shape.

Gabbert: Lots of times they win.

Lyons: They do win. I don't know how it got involved; I think it's just part of—you know, if there was Bigfoot in town—if we had a Sasquatch—then you'd see that in Winter Carnival. . . . It's just part of McCall's history, I guess. It's the Loch Ness monster of McCall, so that's part of it, and it has to be in the sculptures, or in the carnival, or as part of the carnival.[7]

Sharlie was also part of the main Winter Carnival parade, from its early incarnations as the Grand Parade through its evolution into a Mardi Gras Parade. Local people occasionally dressed up like Sharlie in homemade costumes in the early parade years, and an Asian-style Sharlie was paraded annually by various children's school groups in the Mardi Gras parade. The Asian

7 Rob Lyons, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 7 January 2001.

Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 67. Sharlie

Sharlie was also recently incorporated into the children's parade. The Mardi Gras Parade sometimes featured additional Sharlies as well. As described previously, for example, an excavation company decorated its digger to look like Sharlie by covering it in green plastic in 2009. The shovel became a moveable mouth, and an operator inside drove the monster along.

The chamber of commerce occasionally used Sharlie as an official Winter Carnival icon, although not every year. The chamber held a design contest in 2001 for the Winter Carnival T-shirt among local schoolchildren,

and the contest specified that Sharlie had to be used in some way. The winning entry depicted a child building a snowman at the edge of the lake; Sharlie held the snowman's head in its mouth. According to the child artist, Sharlie was helping put the snowman's head on, although, as was typical with Sharlie, there were multiple interpretations: many people thought the picture showed Sharlie stealing the snowman's head off its body. In addition, Sharlie was an image on Winter Carnival pins, and her likenesses appeared on Winter Carnival maps that identified where snow sculptures were located throughout the city and surrounding area.

Sharlie outside of Winter Carnival Contexts

Sharlie images permeated Winter Carnival, but her original existence in McCall was as a legend and memorate, and a source of folkloric beliefs and associations surrounding lake and sea monsters. These associations led to generic affiliations with a variety of joking traditions as well as to the mass media. Richard Bauman (2004) emphasizes the importance of contextualization strategies, which means that it is important to trace the multidimensional web of interrelationships toward which a particular text points as well as the ways these references contextualize and inform each other. To fully understand how and why Sharlie was a carnivalesque figure that generated both laughter and ambivalence for local people and so was easily incorporated into the festival, it is important to examine more closely how people regarded Sharlie outside of Winter Carnival.

Sharlie is most properly identified as a *dite,* a term coined by C.W. von Sydow to describe elements of popular prose traditions that are not formal narratives but remain prose.[8] "The word," von Sydow writes, "is intended to denote what people have to say about one thing or another without characterizing that which is said as true or false, believed in or fictitious" (1948, 107). The term is useful for its flexibility. A primary way that people evoked Sharlie outside of Winter Carnival was narratives of sightings, but there was no single, coherent Sharlie tale. Sharlie sightings also did not have a plot, so they are difficult to characterize as stories (Georges 1971), although legend scholar Linda Dégh (2001) points out that legends index extranormal ideas and so do not have to be fully developed narratives. Narratives of Sharlie sightings suggested mysterious phenomena, and there

8 My thanks to Richard Bauman for guiding me to von Sydow's term.

were ideas about Sharlie, the environment she inhabited, and proper conditions for sightings, as well as explanations of what she might really be, all of which constituted aspects of the Sharlie complex locally and lake-monster traditions more broadly. Everybody in McCall knew somebody who had seen something odd, and archives in Idaho contained examples of narratives of Sharlie sightings. These stories rearranged conventional categories and questioned de facto assumptions about the natural world. They were taken both seriously and lightly, and they were linked to more overt joking traditions, illustrating a complex community relationship to Sharlie and the ways people used her to refigure identity.

The term dite is also useful because it relieves tellers, audience members, and researchers from the burden of proving or disproving belief. Linda Dégh (2001) has long insisted that just because people talk about extraordinary subjects such as lake monsters does not mean they actually believe what is being discussed (see, for example, Dégh 1971, 1996; also Mullen 1971). Belief, in fact, is variable, flexible, and context dependent (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1971). As I present the following narratives, therefore, I do not suggest in any way that the people who shared their stories with me overtly believed in lake monsters; most tellers would likely deny it, although more than a few people did think there was something in the lake. Rather, the extraordinary content of the narrative was what was interesting. To tell a story about a sighting was to engage in a discussion about the *proposition* of something in the lake. It did not imply endorsement but was something of a philosophical discussion about the ontological nature of the world based on perception and interpretation of experience (Hufford 1982).[9]

One main type of Sharlie stories was *memorates,* a term von Sydow uses to describe traditional firsthand accounts of extraordinary experiences. In memorates the experience is individual, but the content of the narrative is stable and widely distributed. The term memorate was further defined by scholars such as Reidar Christiansen, Gunnar Granberg, and Juha Pentikäinen, who relaxed von Sydow's rule that memorates must be strictly firsthand accounts (E. Slotkin 1988; Dégh 2001, 58–79). The vast majority of Sharlie memorates recounted experiences on Payette Lake that the teller

9 Hufford (1982) proposes an "experience-centered" approach to stories of the supernatural, suggesting that beliefs may be determined by perceptions of experience, rather than only by culture, as had been previously supposed. Hufford suggests that tradition frequently provides an explanation (although not necessarily a correct one) of common perceptions of experiences.

described as somehow mysterious but not overtly dramatic; in her study of ghostly narratives, Jeannie Banks Thomas describes this kind of story, common in oral tradition, as "slightly dramatic" (Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas 2007, 29). In these accounts, the narrator did not claim to have seen a lake monster directly, but the stories invoked ideas of a mythic landscape by reporting unusual, mysterious activity on the lake that could not be fully explained. Marilyn Krahn told a typical, slightly dramatic example: "I've never seen the body. But in the summertime when there is no one on the lake waterskiing or jet skiing and no boats out, and there is no wind, I—not frequently but at least four or five times a summer—you see a ripple, a long ripple, and the ripple continues and moves, and there are no ducks—there's not anything that can cause that. And that's what I think is Sharlie. And I think Sharlie is a large, elderly sturgeon."[10]

Krahn's hypothesis that Sharlie was a landlocked sturgeon was a common explanation and appears in other lake-monster traditions as well since sturgeon may attain enormous sizes, up to 5.5 meters long.[11] According to Michel Meurger (1988, 47), Professor Vadim Vladykov of the University of Ottawa cited overgrown sturgeon as the cause of lake-monster rumors in Lake Pohénégamook in 1957 and also in Lake François. Louis-Phillipe Roy, a member of the Sauvage River Hunting and Fishing Club, explained to Meurger that "there are *sea sturgeons* here, as well as sturgeons of the lake. . . . Sturgeons can take on enormous sizes" (1988, 62; italics in original). These rational or "alternative explanations" are also part of legendry (Oring 2008, 136). Other traditional rationalist explanations for Sharlie included a submerged log, the wake of a boat, a flock of ducks, and the lake turning over during particular parts of the season, all of which can also be found elsewhere (Meurger 1988, 49).

Dan Krahn offered another slightly dramatic narrative of a Sharlie sighting, one that emphasizes the importance of both fun and mystery surrounding Sharlie:

> But with Sharlie I would actually have to say, I have been out back of the store, summer mornings, fall mornings. Nobody on the lake, not a single boat. And it's a single wave. It doesn't even go in both directions

10 Marilyn Krahn interview.

11 Grace Jordan notes that this idea was given further validity when a former conservation officer publicly stated that fertilized sturgeon eggs had been planted in the lake (1961,151).

> like a boat wave. This can be one wave coming toward the beach, and the rest is smooth. You know? It may be a fairy tale, whatever, but something is in the water. A rock doesn't make that size of a wave. So I don't know. It's fun to have the myth, the mystery.[12]

Other memorates I documented were more dramatic. In these stories, the narrator actually saw something she or he could not identify in the water, although the person may or may not have labeled the phenomenon as a Sharlie sighting. Ron Thompson shared this memorate, a sighting when he was on a camping trip with his son.

> [My son . . .] got up early in the morning. I mean, I was laying around, it must have been fairly early in the morning. . . . He got out to do his thing out there. And after a couple of minutes, he said, "Dad, there's a big dog in the water." And a couple of minutes later, he was still watching it; he thought it was a big dog. He said, "Dad, are there alligators in Idaho?" And I said, "No, not that I'm aware of." And I thought, well, I better get out. And I wear glasses, so I hunted for my glasses, and I got out on all fours, and I poked my head out of the tent, and he said—"See it out there?" And I looked, and there was this *something* going along in the water. From my right to left. But it was much bigger than an alligator. I thought it was a log at first. 'Till I really looked at it, and it was moving—I mean it was moving pretty fast. And I started to get out of the tent, and what I saw at that time—what I thought was a log was about ten to fifteen feet long. And as I was getting out and standing up, this thing started to rise out of the water. So I grabbed Zachary thinking—what the heck is this? You know, it didn't rise completely out. But what I saw was the top of its head, bulging eyes, and three distinct humps. I mean it was incredible. Three distinct humps. So it rose up and was scooting along the top; so it rose out of the water, and I scrambled to get the camera, and I realized that I had just taken the last picture the night before; I had run out of film.[13]

The fact that the narrator ran out of film for his camera caused us both to laugh because it was typical enough of lake-monster sightings to constitute a distinct motif. In addition, the fact that he described the creature with "three distinct humps" suggests Euro-American tradition at work since the number three is pervasive in a variety of genres (Dundes 1968).

In the next example, the narrator (name withheld) told about a similarly dramatic experience (and also used the number three):

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12 Dan Krahn interview.

13 Ron Thompson (a pseudonym), interview with the author, tape recording, Boise, Idaho, 22 August 1997.

> It was probably around—the sun was just starting to go down, shadows in the trees . . . maybe around six or seven at night. The sun was still up; it was light, but you know it was getting to be evening, but you know the days were longer then; the sun wasn't going down until ten or eleven. Let's see, it was me, D., and S.—we were all sitting there under the trees drinking beer. [The others] were—I don't know—around back. We were the only three sitting on the shore. I was leaning against a tree, S. had her feet in the water, and D. was just sitting down somewhere. We were all just kind of looking out at the water. The only thing I really saw was, uh—well, we all laughed and thought it was a log. I don't know. It appeared to be something that undulated through the water. Maybe had three humps. I don't want to call them humps. I don't know what they were. But there was something out there. I'd say it was at least six feet long. Uh, a hundred feet from the shore.[14]

A second common type of Sharlie narrative is one in which the narrator tells of another person's experience; this third-person narrative is closer to what is commonly considered a formal legend (see E. Slotkin 1988). Rob Lyons told the following story about his father's experience:

> There in the lake in the mouth of the river—both of them were together, and they were doing something, talking, I don't remember what, but they were kind of up high. And they said they saw something. They didn't see it; they just saw the V in the water it created. It was underwater. And uh, like if this is the mouth of the river, kind of came in, buzzed out around the mouth of the river, and went around like that, and went back out. And they looked at each other: "Did you see that?" John was an Englishman—"Bloody hell, yes I did!" . . . They looked at each other. "Are we going to tell anybody?" And they thought that if they told anybody, they were going to think one of two things: One, they were drunk, or they were doing it for publicity. And so they never reported anything, but he said, "There's something out there, and it's big. You can't be under the water and create that big of a wake without being a pretty good size. And we weren't drinking! (But we did afterwards!)."[15]

In this type of story, the narrator reports the alleged experience of a credible witness, such as a father, grandmother, other close relative, or good friend. This closeness shores up the authenticity and reliability of the story (Oring

14 Anonymous, interview with the author, tape recording, Boise, Idaho, 15 June 1996. This transcript has been previously published (Gabbert 2000).

15 Rob Lyons interview.

2008, 131) since presumably relatives and friends of the teller would never lie. To doubt the credibility of the story casts distrust on the authority of the narrator, dramatically increasing its overall rhetorical effectiveness.

Sharlie memorates and legends were based on perceptions of personal experiences, but they were also traditional because they articulated commonly held, widespread ideas associated with European lake monster complexes and therefore were another way, in addition to ski styles, Monte Carlo Night, and Mardi Gras, that McCall linked itself to Europe. These ideas were not necessarily present in a specific Sharlie text, but they were called to mind through association. Sharlie is a lake monster, and lake and sea monsters constitute an old and international folk idea (motif B91.5.2 *Lake Monsters & Sea Serpents)* that has existed since antiquity. Aristotle in *Historia Animalium,* for example, noted that Libya had been attacked by a sea serpent in the fourth century BC; references to sea serpents also appear in Virgil's *Aeneid* and in Pliny (Bright 1991). In Europe the most famous lake monster is the Scottish Loch Ness "Nessie," but lake-monster traditions are also found in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. Lake Storsjön, which is located in the northwestern province of Jämtland, Sweden, even had its local monster, first mentioned in print in 1635, taken off the endangered species list as recently as 2005.[16] Sharlie keeps company in North America with the likes of the monster of Bear Lake in Utah, first rumored to have existed in 1868, and Lake Champlain's "Champ," which was first sighted in 1609 and again as recently as July of 2005. Canada also has widespread lake-monster traditions, particularly in southern Québec. Creatures are rumored to exist there in at least ten lakes, including "Ponik" of Lake Pohénégamook, first sighted in 1873, and "Ashuaps" of Lake Saint-Jean (Meurger 1988).

Michel Meurger (1988, 128) suggests that European lake-monster complexes entail what he calls a "mythic landscape" and he identifies a cluster of environmental motifs common to them. One important one is Motif F713.2 *Bottomless Lakes, Pools, and Bogs,* and Meurger points out that bottomlessness is supposedly characteristic of Lake Pohénégamook, Lake Maskinonge, Lake Okanaga, and Lake Aylmer in Canada, all reputed to have serpents. Noting also that Loch Ness at one point in time was thought to have "a deep abyss, deeper than any abyss in all of Scotland," Meurger writes, playing on words, "Unfathomability, then, is a condition favourable

16 "Mythical Swedish Monster Loses Endangered Status," *Charleston Daily Mail,* 11 November 2005. My gratitude to Steve Siporin for directing me to this reference.

to the existence of a monster, according to the European-American tradition" (1988, 130).

Sharlie folklore drew upon this mythic landscape. Her dwelling place, Payette Lake, had long been rumored to be bottomless, a theory that likely dates to the first survey in 1885, when the territorial controller simply and soberly announced that its depth was unknown. Geologist Edward Rhodenbaugh published a 1925 newspaper article stating that he had sounded the lake to 290 feet and hoped this information would put to rest the bottomless-lake speculation that had been circulating for some years.[17] But the idea that Payette Lake was bottomless persisted, despite Rhodenbaugh's rationalist hopes. Payette Lake was mentioned in a regional survey of bottomless lakes in the Pacific Northwest (Person 1960), and references to its mysterious depth were available in archives through the early 1970s.[18]

Other environmental motifs that Meurger identifies as associated with mythic lake-monster landscapes include "dark water," "sucking currents," and "lake does not render up its drowned" (1988, 130). Payette Lake was considered uncommonly cold, dark, and somewhat dangerous. People were very careful about walking on the ice in winter due to warm pockets of water and apocryphal stories circulated about times in the past when horses crashed through the ice during winter and their bodies were never found, a story that dovetails nicely with the motif of the water's possessiveness. One story in oral circulation tells of an airplane that allegedly crashed in the lake and was never found. Motif G308.4, *lake made dangerous by haunting serpent,* seems to underlie these ideas.

Underwater caverns and connecting lakes are other common landscape motifs for lake-monster complexes (Meurger 1988, 135), and the supposed existence of hidden underwater tunnels replicates the idea that there were secret tunnels under the city of McCall (see chapter four). Payette Lake was

17 Edward F. Rhodenbaugh, "Payette Lake's Deepest Spot 290 Feet," *Idaho Statesman,* 4 October 1925, sec. 2, 1.

18 According to Henry A. Person's 1960 "Notes and Queries" contribution in *Western Folklore,* bottomless lakes across the Pacific Northwest include Lake Crescent, Offut Lake, and Long Lake near Olympia, Washington, as well as Lake Chelan in the central part of the state. American Lake, Gravelly Lake, and Steilacoom Lake near Tacoma also are reputed to be bottomless and connected by underwater passages. Wapato Lake is known to be somewhat shallow but apparently has a bottomless hole in the middle. Hoodlum Lake, although now apparently drained, used to be bottomless; it was also thought to be connected to the Puget Sound by underground tunnels.

rumored to have underwater caverns that connected it through aqueducts to lakes in Oregon and other parts of the state, and this sometimes explained why Sharlie could not be found. Grace Jordan, for example, writes that due to the volcanic nature of the area, Sharlie lived in caverns in Payette Lake warmed by underwater hot springs and "ventured to the surface only after warm weather made the upper waters pleasant" (1961, 150). In a short overview to her 1971 student project entitled "Sharlie, An Idaho Lake Monster," Cindy Anderson writes, "They have supposedly never measured the bottom of Payette Lake." One of Anderson's informants, Kathy Johnson, also mentioned that the lake was deep and, in fact, the bottom had never been found, indicating that the idea was alive and well in the early 1970s.[19] Writer Mary Jane Williams mentions the depth of the lake and the difficulty of sounding it because of the many shelves and underwater caverns (1971, 12). The underwater cavern motif appears in John Gutowski's study of the giant turtle hunt of Churubusco, Indiana (1998, 42), and these motifs are found in Utah's lake-monster legends as well.

The motifs associated with mythic lake-monster habitats usually were not apparent in any specific narrative performance but were called to mind any time someone told about a Sharlie sighting. McCall resident Karen Morris said that she was familiar with such motifs: "I've heard that over the years, that there's a place out in the lake that they've never been able to find the bottom of. And, uh, that there's springs all over the place . . . that Sharlie can hide in and stuff, underground caves and stuff."[20]

The concept of a mythic landscape was not merely a local phenomena or even one only associated with lake monster traditions. It was also an important element in American frontier mythology and so tied the Sharlie complex to the national imagination. In his study of American folklore, Richard M. Dorson (1982) identifies sea serpents and lake monsters as linked closely to the national landscape, which was thought to contain oddities of nature, including monsters and giant beasts. People felt that nature, particularly in the West, was both unlimited and threatening, so sea-serpent stories were part of a larger national repertoire of exaggerated tales of vast natural resources and fabulous creatures. Gutowski's (1998) study of the development of Turtle Days in Indiana demonstrates, for example, how the

19 Cindy Anderson, "Sharlie, the McCall Monster," 1971, a student project originally deposited in file 03177137 of the Northwest Folklore Archives. Now at the Idaho State Historical Society in the Idaho Folklore Collection, 1959-1990, IFA 83/118.

20 Karen Morris interview.

hunt for Oscar the turtle put into practice national ideals of individualism, a heroic quest, and a Protestant work ethic, effectively illustrating the way folkloric behavior enacts national ideologies. Local sculptor Mark Bennett echoed these ideas, seeing a direct connection between Sharlie and the surrounding Idaho wilderness:

> I think that it is a unique thing to our lake, you know. You don't hear about a lot of other—there is Loch Ness, of course, but I've never heard of other people when talking about their lakes of having their little sea serpent. . . . It's a character thing of McCall that it has this sea serpent in this lake, and I just love the idea [of] that, you know. I would guess that because this used to be such a primitive and hard-to-get-to area, it kind of fit. You know, you are way out in the wilderness, and you know, there could be sea serpents in the lakes here.[21]

Beliefs about the landscape's abundance, its oddities of nature, and its expansiveness were not just innocent ideas in the nineteenth century. They provided ideological justification for frontier exploration, conquest, and domination and created a national narrative steeped in violence, exclusivity, and feminization of the landscape (Kolody 1984; Kaplan 1993; R. Slotkin 1992, 1993). Landscape that was described as excessively bountiful was also, for example, portrayed in the national imagination as uninhabited, despite the fact that Native Americans lived there. Native Americans either were discursively erased entirely from people's minds or framed as on the verge of extinction in this vision of the nation's Manifest Destiny, easing the way ideologically for Anglo-American conquest and settlement.

Interestingly Sharlie's origins were sometimes (although not commonly) attributed to a Native American story, what Jared Farmer calls "Indianist" origins (2008, 244), suggesting further symbolic ties to national myth. The story concerned a couple whose canoe was overturned on the lake, presumably by the lake monster. They drowned, so the story had a tragic outcome. Native Americans frequently represent wildness in Anglo-American folklore and have a close, tragic connection to the landscape. Discursively situating Sharlie's origins as somehow both Native American and tragic linked her directly to national frontier imagery. Native American origins also supply a veneer of antiquity and authenticity (Neustadt 1992) and are a relatively common strategy in the western United States for lake-monster stories and

21 Mark Bennett, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 21 February 2001.

Photo by author

Fig. 68. "Buckaroo Bear," sculpture of Sharlie and Smokey Bear by the Forest Service, 1998.

other kinds of tales, such as legends about buried treasure. That Sharlie was partly situated in national mythology became clear to me in a sculpture constructed by the Forest Service for the local competition in 1998, which combined the civilizing influence of the Forest Service with images of the cowboy and evoked ideas about the dominance of *man* over nature. The sculpture depicted Smokey Bear dressed like a cowboy in full chaps, cowboy boots, and spurs riding Sharlie like a bucking bronco. The title was "Sharlie and the Buckaroo Bear" (fig. 68).

The associations that narratives of lake-monster sightings prompted were important in understanding the full range of Sharlie's signification, but the attitude, or the "intonation, countenance, and demeanor" (Oring 2008, 138) people revealed when they listened to and told these stories was also important. These attitudes, particularly irony and sarcasm, offered a range of metacommentary. People listened to stories of sightings carefully. Stories about sightings were fundamentally mysterious because they questioned ontological categories: they rearranged and reclassified reality. Like all accounts of the extraordinary, they challenged rational presumptions about the natural world (Dégh 1991). They intimated the possibility of a mythic landscape, one that contained a creature science was unable to find,

undetectable underwater caverns, bottomless lakes, and sentient, possessive waters. These stories implied that the world might not be exactly the way it appeared and that our understanding of nature was inadequate.

Sharlie stories therefore were risky for both tellers and listeners (Oring 2008, 133), first because they suggested the possibility of a reclassification of reality, and second because issues of truth and falsehood permeated them. Richard Bauman (1986) has closely examined the way personal-experience narratives, tall tales, and generic expectations intersect in Texas dog trading circles to create perceptions of lying. Traders seek to dispel the appearance of lying by insisting they are telling the truth about dogs they want to sell, which heightens perceptions among participants that they are indeed lying. Sharlie stories postulated a degree of truth yet recounted something fantastic. Drawing on the work of Susan Stewart, Jeannie Banks Thomas notes that what is ambivalent exists in more than one domain at once; its identity is not clearly fixed (1997, 48). In performing Sharlie narratives, both narrators and audience members were aware of the tension between fact and fiction created by stories that reorder the world. The audience had no firsthand knowledge of the recounted experience—nor, frequently, did the narrator—yet these narratives invited the audience to believe them at some level, or temporarily suspend disbelief, or at least consider the possibility of truth even if they immediately rejected it. Audience members ran the risk of being fooled by these narratives and the extraordinary claims they made. Narrators were also at risk because they might be labeled fools, drunks, or crazy—that is, reclassified by their audience.

Rather than insisting on truth, as do Bauman's dog traders, participants minimized risk by creating distance from the ontological propositions of these accounts. The most common distancing strategy was laughing. Jeannie Banks Thomas (1997) notes that laughter frequently occurs in nonhumorous narratives that challenge conventions because it is a way to distance both teller and listener from the topic. Sharlie stories were not funny; they were mysterious, and they were frequently treated as a little joke or with uncertainty. The second anonymous story of the Sharlie sighting, for example, was told to me by the person who experienced it. Yet even the narrator did not really believe what he saw was Sharlie, and he told the story in a highly joking, sarcastic, and defensive manner. He laughed while telling the story, and I laughed as well. We were both nervous. Such paralinguistic meaning is difficult to render orthographically, but the attitude of the narrator and the audience is essential in understanding the way that Sharlie

worked. The result was ambivalence and laughter about both the narratives and the experiences they related. This attitude cast doubt on the stories, which contrasted with the powerful claims of first-person accounts or those by trusted third persons. It protected narrators from being reclassified by their audience as fools or worse.

Laughter also was part of a second distancing strategy, which associated Sharlie sightings with alcohol and therefore reframed the stories as unreliable. References to inebriation within the Sharlie complex were so common that drunkenness might even constitute an additional motif. An old joke in the area postulated that one could only see Sharlie in the mirror of the back bar of the Yacht Club. The Yacht Club was a popular bar at the edge of Payette Lake, so presumably anyone who saw Sharlie there also had been actively drinking. Local resident Marlee Wilcomb associated the naming of Sharlie with a story about two drunks that her grandmother (who was a teetotaler) told her: Two drunks were on the dock the Yacht Club. One of them, who was named Charlie, fell off. His friend, who was so inebriated that he slurred his words, went looking for him calling "Shhharlie"? [22] Other people echoed Wilcomb's appraisal. Cindy Anderson's informant, Kathy Johnson, noted that "it seems to take the right combination of martinis and company for Sharlie to make his appearance"—and indeed, Sharlie was once sculpted as playfully curled up in a martini glass in Winter Carnival. Ann Fitch also notes that her informant Jack Tanes had been "enjoying a few beers" when he spotted Sharlie in 1963,[23] and the narrator of the second anonymous story told to me had been drinking as well.

Sharlie stories (and lake-monster traditions in general) generate tension by mediating truth and lying, and they generate nervous laughter. They therefore are affiliated with other traditional genres that also manipulate, exaggerate, or make potentially false claims about reality, which are funny or playful, and where an audience may be deceived. These genres include jokes, windies, tall tales, pranks, and hoaxes (fig. 69). Dorson (1982) suggests sea serpents and other traditional American monsters are comic because of their association with joking traditions. These genres fool unknowing victims, so they mediate not only truth and lying, fact and fiction, but also the categories of insider and outsider. Tall tales and bragging, for example, frequently

22 Marlee Wilcomb, personal communication, February 03, 2011.

23 Anderson, "Sharlie, An Idaho Lake Monster"; Fitch, "Sharlie: The Search for an Identity."

Serpy Sam . . .
PEEK-A-BOO!
. . . who was sighted by several townspeople and two Boiseans last week. The confusion over the Fourth of July has apparently caused him to seek a more secluded spot in the lake.

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Fig. 69. A humorous early incarnation of Sharlie.

play off actually-existing characteristics of the landscape, but they exaggerate them to preposterous proportions, so they are also lies (C. Brown 1987). Barre Toelken (1990, 25) notes that hyperbole and exaggeration are important modes of western expression that accurately articulate extreme experiences, and insiders know exactly where reality starts and exaggeration begins (see also Danielson 1990). These stories are frequently used to fool outside audiences, who are unaware of the line between reality and fiction; employing them may incorporate a newcomer into the group (S. Jones 1976). Drawing on the rhetoric of the traditional tall tale and western bragging traditions, local resident Barry Binning once commented on Sharlie: "If I ever got him, I'd jump on his back. I would. I'd ride that SOB. I wouldn't kill it, but I'd sure get a good hold," illustrating that Sharlie was sometimes described locally in the language of a tall tale.[24]

24 Barry Binning, interview with Elfriede Gabbert, fieldnotes, McCall, Idaho, January–April 1987. My mother, Elfriede Gabbert, did a semester collection project on Sharlie for a folklore class in 1987, and her interest in the subject piqued mine. It was she who first noted that Sharlie frequently appears in Winter Carnival.

Jokes, hoaxes, and tall tales about fantastic animals, the weather, and other aspects of nature have long been part of traditional, usually male, frontier behavior and rely on notions of a mythical, or at least extraordinary, landscape (Rourke 1931). William Wright, for example, was an associate of Mark Twain who wrote for the Nevada *Territorial Enterprise* from the 1860s to the 1890s. His pseudonym was Dan DeQuille, and he was a famous nineteenth-century trickster who used traditional complexes of mythic landscapes and mysterious creatures to generate chaos. His famous hoaxes have been well documented, including his discovery of four-inch Washoe shooflies, a black bug of the genus hum, singing stones, spring water that tasted like chicken soup, and solar armor to protect the wearer from desert heat. DeQuille apparently sent a fake bug to the curator of the Smithsonian Institution, which the scientist bought, ruining the man's career (Loomis 1946:26–71). Mody Boatright ([1942] 1961, 56), in his study of frontier humor, describes these practices as "loading the greenhorn": filling a newcomer's ear with lies to make him appear foolish.

Local people therefore unsurprisingly sometimes used Sharlie as a joke when tourists (outsiders) were present. Rob Lyons explained that he once used Sharlie to scare a group of visiting teenagers who were swimming in the lake. He recalled, "I don't remember how or why they were here. They had a week. I think it was at one of the camps. But they were from Indiana. And they were thirteen, fourteen, fifteen [years old] probably. I told them about it [Sharlie] . . . [and they asked me], '[Do] you go swimming?' [I replied no] Uh huh. I waded out there, [but] I wasn't going swimming." As was typical with Sharlie stories, Lyons was having fun. He explained, "I kept a straight face, super seriously. It's something for the locals to play with if you find somebody fairly gullible." At the same time, in our interview Lyons maintained an ambivalent attitude typical of legends. "I mean, there's no doubt in my mind that something's out there—I personally think it's a sturgeon. But it's fun."[25]

Sharlie inspired pranks. A prank is similar to a hoax because both depend on an unknowing victim that is fooled. Hoaxes, however, such as those perpetrated by Dan DeQuille, depend on public victims—they frequently use the media—while pranks are more personal. In the following example, the recipient of Mike Dingle's prank was not a regional outsider, but its impact still depended upon a victim who wasn't in on the joke. Dingle owned a cabin on Payette Lake and recalled a prank he played using Sharlie:

25 Rob Lyons interview.

> Some friends and I were touring around in the Wellcraft [boat] late at night during the summer circa '87/'88. We skimmed by Shore Lodge. To our surprise, we saw a very large Sharlie floating in the water and moored near the dock. I think it was completely made out of foam. I was very familiar with the Sharlie legend. For reasons that seemed good at the time, we could not resist and decided to take its head (I remember it slid off easily). It measured plus-or-minus two feet by two feet. It adorned our bow as the figurehead for the remainder of our tours around the lake that night (it must have been a full moon or close to it—I remember the lake was very lit up). . . . We weren't sure what we were going to do with it. I think we were devising some master practical joke, but we didn't finish our plans that trip [and hid it]. We returned a week or three later. It wasn't where we stashed it; I never saw it again.[26]

These joking traditions reordered perceptions of reality in some way and then revealed what they described as real to be false, at the expense of an unwitting victim. The result was laughter and ambivalence as well as a reinforcement of insider group ties and identity. The association of Sharlie with jokes, tourists, pranks, and tall tales not only shed doubt on the credibility of the Sharlie memorates and legends but also cast her further toward laughter, trickery, and a temporarily reordering of the world, all qualities that are associated with the carnivalesque.

Sharlie and the Media: Ensuring Celebrity and Fame

Tall tales, jokes, and pranks are part of oral culture, but they have also long been used to market regions and commodify regional identity and so are the tools of capitalism and boosterism (fig. 70). Tall-tale postcards, which picture gigantic vegetables, fruit, fish, or other agricultural products, are a good example (Siporin 2000). It is unsurprising, therefore, that as a kind of tall tale, the media used Sharlie to endorse regional identity by promoting her to outsiders and linking her to national realms (Gutowski 1998, 46). One early national reference comes from a *Time* magazine article and refers to Sharlie as "Slimy Slim" since she had not yet been officially named. The article was written in the jocular, folksy manner typical of journalists attempting to imitate the style of oral narratives (Dorson 1976). The tongue-in-cheek article begins, "From time to time over 15 years, people have seen an enormous sea serpent glubbing about in Idaho's Payette Lake. . . . Since July 02, some 30 people

26 Mike Dingle, e-mail communication with the author, 13 March 2007.

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Fig. 70. Sharlie is associated with boosterism.

(including Republicans and teetotalers) have found themselves staring at his periscope-like head" (Slimy Slim 1944, 22).[27] The article includes a number of references to traditional motifs, such as explanations of Slimy Slim's existence as related to sturgeon and drunkenness, and it situated Sharlie within national mythology by noting one possible source for her origin, a Paul Bunyan legend in which Paul and Babe the Blue Ox were fishing for sturgeon. The story says that Babe pulled the huge fish out of the water so hard that it sailed all the way into Payette Lake. The article concludes, "A jerk like that could well have given the creature a curvature of the spine" and states in parentheses that the serpent is supposed to have three humps.

The local media played a large role in giving Sharlie a concrete identity, using the dite for booster purposes. *Payette Lakes Star* newspaper editor Boone McCallum held a naming contest in 1953 that attracted nationwide attention when the Associated Press and United Press wire services picked

27 The comparison of the creature's head to a periscope is interesting given the publication date of 1944, when fears of German invasion by submarine were gripping the nation.

up the contest. McCallum offered a five-dollar prize for the best submission, an amount that was supplemented by a Boise newspaper. A total of seventy-five dollars was awarded: forty dollars for first prize, twenty dollars for second, ten dollars for third, and five dollars for fourth. Judges included Idaho Governor Len Jordan; state senator Frank Freeman; state representative Ralph L. Paris; noted citizen Arthur C. Jones, MD; McCall Mayor Art Roberts; Roy May, president of the McCall Rotary Club; Mrs. Grace Hoff, president of Payette Lakes Business and Professional Women's Club; and Mrs. Wayne Webb, president of the Payette Lakes Jay-C-Ettes. The contest generated 203 submissions.[28]

A woman named Le Isle Hennefer Tury, a former Idahoan living in Springfield, Virginia, submitted the winning entry of Sharlie, which was apparently a reference to a popular comedy routine by radio personality Jack Pearl. Pearl played a character named Baron Munchausen, which was loosely based on based the real Baron Münchhausen, who lived from 1720 to 1797 and whose lies and extravagant stories became sources for literary tales published about him.[29] As the baron, Pearl told outrageous stories over the radio in a fake German accent. His standard reply when challenged on the veracity of his stories by his interlocutor was, "Vass you dere, Sharlie?" and the phrase became known nationally. Referencing, as it did, a context of unbelievable lying and tall tales, the highly appropriate name stuck, and McCall's lake monster has been Sharlie ever since.[30]

The local newspaper also promoted Sharlie by printing narratives of sightings when people were willing to claim publicly that they had seen

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28 "Let's Give Our Sea Serpent a Name of Its Own," *Payette Lakes Star,* 19 November 1953; "Let's Give Our Sea Serpent a Name of Its Own," *Payette Lakes Star,* 26 November 1953; "Idaho Statesman Joins Star to Give Name to McCall Sea Serpent," *Payette Lakes Star,* 3 December 1953; "Serpent Naming Competition Stretches Across Nation; Facecious [*sic*] Letters Come, with Names to Puzzle Even a Webster," *Payette Lakes Star,* 17 December 1953; "Hundreds of Names Come for Serpent of Payette Lakes; Prominent Persons to Serve in Selecting Most Appropriate Entries," *Payette Lakes Star,* 31 December 1953; "Names for Serpent to Go to Judges; 203 Entries," *Payette Lakes Star,* 7 January 1954.

29 See the Wikipedia entry on the baron online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baron_Münchhausen.

30 The name Boon received second prize, Finnigin got third prize, and Watzit took fourth prize. "'Sharlie' Is Name Selected for Famous McCall Serpent by Group of Judges," *Star- News,* 21 January 1954; see also Tom Grote, "Lake Watchers Ask, 'Are You Dere, Sharlie?'" *Star-News,* 3 July 1985, A5; Tom Grote, "Sharlie 'Lives'! Payette Lake Serpent Makes First Reported Appearance Since 2002," *Star-News,* 13 August 2009, A1.

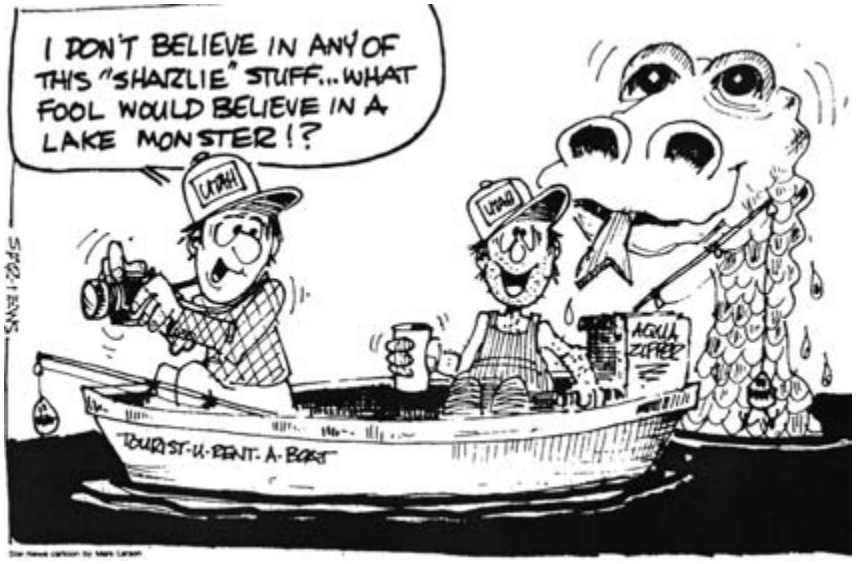

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Fig. 71. Editorial cartoon associating Sharlie with tourism.

something. Alongside these news stories, the cartoonist for the *Star-News* frequently used Sharlie as the basis for editorial cartoons, linking news (e.g., truth) and humor together within the same contextual framework. One 1985 example depicted two Utah tourists, one with camera in hand, the other drinking a made-up (but obviously alcoholic) beverage called "Aqua-Zipper." Both were oblivious to the lake monster looming behind their Tourist-U-Rent-A-Boat. The caption read, "I don't believe in any this 'Sharlie' stuff . . . what fool would believe in a lake monster!?" (fig. 71). This single frame depicted associations with tourism, drinking, insiders and outsiders, and tall tales as well as an ambivalent stance toward belief.

Current newspaper editor Tom Grote continued the media tradition of promoting Sharlie to tourists by annually sponsoring a Sharlie statue in the Winter Carnival local snow-sculpture competition during my research period. Grote thought of Sharlie as an aspect of local identity that needed to be remembered, something that was fun for children, and a tourist gimmick to promote McCall. The sculpture he sponsored in 2008, called "The Duel," highlighted humor, monstrosity, and Old West popular culture by depicting Sharlie and Bigfoot in a movie-style High Noon western shootout (fig. 72). The monsters stood back to back, guns drawn from holsters, about to count off their paces before turning to fire. When I first asked Grote about

Photo courtesy of the *Star-News*

Fig. 72. "The Duel: Sharlie vs. Bigfoot."

the connection between Winter Carnival and Sharlie, he flatly answered that there was none. When I pointed out that he currently had a Sharlie sculpture outside his business, he made the point that Sharlie wasn't an essential element of the festival saying, "She's not organic to the . . . [Winter Carnival]. But we use the opportunity to promote her and keep her legend alive."

I asked Grote to clarify this point. He indicated that he felt Sharlie was becoming lost as a part of local identity, and he purposefully commissioned Sharlie sculptures to keep the idea of her going: "We've lost Sharlie, so we need to get her back. . . . So many new people in Idaho and McCall. Sharlie is hanging on, but we need to keep her going.

Gabbert: And that's why you've been doing Sharlie sculptures?
Grote: Yeah. It's fun. Again it's part of the tourist culture [e.g., for outsiders], and we want to keep that going. Gives some people something to remember. And the kids. It's a kid thing, too.

Grote also added somewhat seriously, "We believe in Sharlie since nobody has disproved her existence."[31] Then he laughed.

Despite Grote's impression that Sharlie was being forgotten, she was sold as a symbol of local identity in tourist objects and therefore also had a solid presence in mass-marketed consumer culture. Sea-monster likenesses appeared on restaurant menus, in bars, and for sale in local shops. A serpent or dragonlike creature was portrayed lurking below the water, waiting to trip up water skiers, or lounging on the rooftop of a cabin, smoking a cigarette, both of which identified the area as a summer resort. I also observed dragonlike figurines as an icon on summer tourist maps produced by real-estate companies, stuffed animals, windsocks, and other artwork for sale in local shops. One restaurant offered a Sharlie burger, and Rob Lyons used to own a restaurant called Sharlie's. Interestingly, however, none of this Sharlie paraphernalia was highlighted during Winter Carnival, nor were images of Sharlie sold as souvenirs. Sharlie was primarily featured in snow sculptures, the parade, and occasionally (but not always) as a symbol of Winter Carnival on chamber of commerce buttons and T-shirts.

The featuring of Sharlie in the news media, her existence as an object of mass consumer culture, her ties to European lake-monster traditions, and her links to national mythology suggest that she was not merely a local community member or symbol of local identity but also a national and international celebrity. Sharlie received a lot of attention. She was regularly featured in the paper, occasionally made national news *(Time* magazine), had European cousins (the Loch Ness Nessie), and had restaurants, entrees, and other miscellaneous items named after her. She was a prominent community

31 Tom Grote, interview with the author, digital recording, McCall, Idaho, 26 January 2008.

member—a bigwig. Marilyn Krahn explained, "He's very famous and wonderful. And I guess if you lived as long as he lived, why you deserve to be famous. It's a wonderful legend from the lake. 'Course Sharlie is sound asleep in the deep in the wintertime, but he's such a big part of the town and the lake, he's always there for us."[32]

Sharlie, Laughter, and the Carnivalesque

In his classic study of Rabelais's depictions of pre-Lenten carnival celebrations in medieval Europe, Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin ([1968] 1984) identifies a folk tradition that he calls the carnivalesque and that is incarnated in laughter. Carnivalesque laughter is not ordinary laughter. It is transgressive laughter that temporarily mocks, parodies, overturns, and even temporarily destroys established social orders and presumptions about reality. It is evoked by a style that Bakhtin calls "grotesque realism," and "the material bodily principle" in which images of the body, food, drink, defecation, and sexual life become exaggerated. Grotesque realism accomplishes its effect by thrusting all that is exalted by society into the lower material bodily stratum: the belly and digestive and reproductive organs (19–23, chapters 5 and 6). Portrayed most aptly in the monstrous bodies of Gargantua and Pantagruel, the grotesque body is out of control.

In her study of nonhumorous narratives, Jeannie Banks Thomas points out that the body and the horrible things sometimes done to it may prompt laughter (1997). Gargantua and Pantagruel are giants that are alternately rude, funny, stupid, and dangerous. Huge bellies, protuberant noses, gigantic sexual organs, excessive food and drink, beatings, violence, dismemberment, blood, urine, and excrement characterize their physique and actions and provoked laughter. Bakhtin argues that these acts and the laughter they generated temporarily overturned or confounded established social orders, such as the Church, and opened up new possibilities. Carnivalesque laughter, therefore, is a source of both destruction and renewal: a powerful, ambivalent force.

Bakhtin's ideas about the carnivalesque have been important in theorizing festivals. The idea that some types of festivals and celebrations may reverse or invert the normal social order is commonly accepted today. Terms

32 Marilyn Krahn interview.

that suggest a reordering of the social world include reversal, inversion, and world upside-down (Babcock 1978). The traditional pre-Lenten carnival celebrations, as well as Mardi Gras and Halloween, are examples of festivals that are considered particularly carnivalesque, although the degree to which social order is reversed or upheld remains a matter of debate (Abrahams and Bauman 1978; Lindahl 1996b). But all festivals, even those such as Winter Carnival that are not overtly transgressive or inversive but instead boosterish, create an atmosphere of playfulness and fun and therefore partake in an alternate reality to a certain degree because play is associated with laughter and temporarily transforms reality or the social order. Frequently in play, taboos are broken, boundaries are crossed, and categories can be mixed up; it is therefore a realm for experimentation. Play also is fundamentally ambiguous (Sutton-Smith 1997). As a genre that invokes play, festivals open up a range of possible meanings and interpretations as well as generate new ideas, and this is why ambiguity is one of their characteristics (Turner 1983).

Winter Carnival did not reverse or invert established social orders, but Sharlie was a carnivalesque figure nonetheless. Like Gargantua and Pantagruel, Sharlie was monstrous. She was considered benign and mysterious rather than terrifying, rude, or dangerous, but her body was supposedly gigantic, and when she was made into a snow sculpture, the bigger, the better, was the unspoken rule. The laughter and ambivalence inspired by Sharlie was different from the laughter of medieval carnival prompted by the bodies and actions of Rabelais's giants, yet there were similarities. The earthiness, violence, and excessiveness that characterized medieval carnivalesque laughter were not factors, but Sharlie was used to reassemble reality, confound categories, ensure celebrity through the media, and make fools of people all at the same time. Narratives of Sharlie sightings proposed a serious, fundamental mystery—the possibility of a local, mythic landscape—but the seriousness and awe these stories suggested were reframed through laughter, joking attitudes, and the suspicion of alcohol. Sharlie was also a source of jokes, pranks, and tall tales; a tie to national mythologies; and a tourist attraction. These usages mediated between reality and fiction, truth and lies, and insiders and outsiders, confusing preconceived categories and generating new meanings. This combination of laughter, playfulness, and ambivalence is characteristic of carnivalesque and similar figures (such as tricksters) that overturn or reassemble reality (Sutton-Smith 2005).

It is little wonder then that Winter Carnival and Sharlie went together like Christmas and Santa Claus, as Marilyn Krahn originally suggested to

me, even though Sharlie did not appear overtly carnivalesque in Winter Carnival. Roger Abrahams writes that in festival, "the transforming figures tend to be clowns or magicians, performers not to be taken seriously" (1987, 179). Sharlie was a boundary crosser, mediating past and present; narrative and event; popular culture, folklore, and the mass media; myth and history. She existed within a broad framework of joking and playfulness. If the serious business of imagining and reimagining community was actually to work, none of it should count. Other Winter Carnival events split the poles of community identity into the very intensive and broadly extensive; Sharlie mixed them up in multidimensional ways.

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Scholars frequently situate figures in tourist festivals within a framework of the commodification or invention of tradition (Hobswam and Ranger 1983). Tradition is reworked into a cultural commodity that is consumed by an outside audience; capital drives the production of difference, poaching on the traditional to reproduce itself. It would be easy to suggest that incorporating Sharlie into Winter Carnival was an example of how local identity is marketed to promote tourism because this was true to some extent. Sharlie's entrance into the revived festival during the 1960s occurred during a crucial moment of socioeconomic transformation.

But tourism, boosterism, and capital are only three of several frames of reference. Tourism and boosterism were quite closely linked with more traditional carnival laughter, the rearrangement of categories, and ambivalence, belying conventional notions that tradition works separately from commodification (Goldstein, Grider, and Thomas 2007, 171). Sharlie is a rich, meaning-making resource, and incorporating her into the festival allowed new meanings to generate by putting old ones into new contexts. While tourists who viewed Sharlie sculptures or saw the Sharlie dragon in the parade might not have had the benefit of local knowledge and therefore viewed her merely as mythic in a general sense, McCall residents recalled the newspaper stories and oral accounts they had heard over the years, and their associations. The year I worked with the Krahn snow-sculpting team on their figure of Sharlie, one man walked by and said jokingly, "Hey—he wasn't that big when I saw him!" Sharlie representations in the festival were significant things (Fiske 1993, 206).

And so it was that a carnivalesque lake monster was paraded down the street and constructed in snow and ice every year as a central Mardi Gras symbol during Winter Carnival. Parades frequently display the most powerful

object in the community by carrying it through the streets. Roger Abrahams writes that on such occasions, the goal is "to enliven it, perhaps even bring it back to life" (1987, 180). The community's oldest denizen—the one that generated laughter—was sighted/cited every year to renew the social body. Ambivalent and carnivalesque, community member and international celebrity, Sharlie was indeed brought to life annually by some twenty-odd schoolchildren, undulating through the streets as visible proof of McCall's persisting mystery. Incorporating her into Winter Carnival associated her with community and the greater social body, which, as McCall's oldest resident and its most famous member, is where she probably should be.